7: Columbia U. S-4,5 1956 RHl Caucasia RHl
Georgia RIl

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

E. G. 596

In older times, the smallest social unit in the Caucasus was the extended family (Georg. didi odzhakhi), consisting of several generations related in the male line who lived together in one house or in several houses located close together. Such families could reach the size of forty or fifty, sometimes even a hundred, persons.

The family was headed by a headman (Georg. uprosi k'atsi; the Circassian term thamada is also widespread) and a headwoman (Georg. deda sakhlisi), usually the oldest members, sometimes elected for a period or for life. The headman represented the family to the outside, directed the economic affairs, supervised the male labor, settled disputes between male members of the family and led the religious rites which were closely connected with the sib organization. The headwoman had the direction of domestic affairs and wielded the same authority over the female family-members as the headman over the male ones. Property was owned by the family as a whole; personal property existed only in the matter of clothing and arms for the men--and of some cattle, household utensils, etc., constituting the dowry (Georg. satavno), as far as the women were concerned. Originally, the extended family split up only with the death of the patriarch, each son setting up an independent household with his sons and grand-

C. G. 596 children; later, married sons with adult offspring would separate from the family even if the father was still alive. The final stage was that each married couple set up a household of its own. The original joint family survived until recently in some remote corners, particularly among the Svan and the Pshav. There C. G. 476 is a tradition of mutual aid between families with regard to tasks exceeding the forces of a single unit (agricultural tasks, vintage, house-building, tapestry-weaving, etc.). These relations obtain even between unrelated families, C. G. 621 but often whole villages or sections of villages consisted of groups of related families (clans). Such family-settlements exist at the present time; a kolkhoz or a brigade in a kolkhoz may consist entirely of persons bearing the same family name.

C. A. 608 In the whole N. Caucasus and also in Armenia the institution of milk-relationship existed. A child suckled by a woman belonging to a certain family became related to that family, as did all its relatives, and these ties were considered as sacred as those of blood relationship. In the N. Caucasus such a relationship could also be established ritually in the case of older persons, namely by mere contact with a woman's breast; this was carried so far that even a forcible performing of this ritual could end a blood feud, as the act made the injured family and that from which "blood was sought" related "by milk." In this

595 (1) Custom permits *all* North Caucasians and their neighbours, whether Christian or Mohammedan, to marry more than one wife. The Tartars near the city of Derbend in the eighteenth century are the only exception, but even in this single case, it ist not certain whether they were monogamists *de jure* or only *de facto*.

[177] (2) Everywhere polygyny is *pre-Islamic*, even if previous to their conversion to Islamism the particular tribe happened to be Christian. We might rightly, therefore, inquire into the possible origin of polygyny in the Caucasus. Polygyny, if borrowed at all, was not borrowed as an *isolated* institution. On the contrary, it seems to be a North Caucasian possession, first of all, as old as the practice [596] of levirate (*infra*, pp. 71—75). Furthermore, it seems to be a North Caucasian [601] cultural possession as old as the economic, social, and religious structure of the North Caucasian family itself. Here we understand "family" in its broad sense, including the joint-family and sib. We cannot now describe this family structure in detail. Briefly, by "the economic, social, and religious structure of the family" we understand that the family in North Caucasia has been and in many places still is the *raison d'être* of the individual.[30e] Whatever the individual does or whatever is done to him or for him has only one aim, the perpetuation and [581] prosperity of the family. Now, in the mind of the North Caucasian, polygyny is an immense asset and at times absolutely indispensable for the economic, social, and religious life of the all-important and solely-important family.

593 *Economically* considered, the wife is extremely important. In the North 562 Caucasus it is the wife who does most of the work (*infra*, pp. 156—159). In fact, sometimes a rich Avar will marry a son to a poor girl or to a widow of a lower class, with whom he is forbidden all communication, in order to have an additional worker in the house.[31] Moreover, a wife is not only a *worker*; she 842 is the "*worker-producing*" organ of the family. Even though boys are preferred (*infra*, pp. 159 ff), girls prove to be good and valuable workers and bring in, at times, a large brideprice (*infra*, pp. 82—91). Now, the more wives there are in the household, the more "worker-producing" organs there are, and by that very fact, at least in the mind of the natives, the family becomes so much the more economically healthy and secure.

The *religious* structure of the family may have contributed just as much to [769] the rise of polygyny as did the economic form of life. The most sacred duty of the individual and of the individual family is, or at least has been, to perpetuate itself, and thus to perpetuate the cult of the ancestors. It is a fact throughout North Caucasus that only a *son* can perpetuate the family and prevent the greatest calamity imagineable, its extinction. But a wife is precisely the "*boy-producing*" organ. If this organ is lacking or fails to function the family is doomed. Today one of the main motives for taking a second wife is sterility.[32] Or again, a second wife will be acquired if the first gives birth only to girls.

[30e] According to ancient customary laws.

[31] L'vov, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[32] Cf. K. Maćavariani, "Nĕkotoryja čerty iz žizni Abchazcev. Položenie ženščiny v Abchazii," SMOMPK, IV (1884), No. 2, p. 42. E. G. Pčelina, "Rodil'nye obyčai u osetin," SE, 1937, No. 4. p. 88.

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RHl Caucasia RHl

By Purchase

has in places disappeared completely, namely in the modern cities, where both partners earn money before their marriage (p. 197), while in other places it has disappeared officially, continuing only as a secret practice (p. 197). In 1921 the bride wealth fluctuated between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 (p. 198).

Generally the *kalym* is so high that the entire joint-family of the prospective groom must share the burden. According to Cherkess customary law, when a joint-family decides to split into several units and consequently the common possessions must be divided, a portion must first be set aside as *kalym* for the unmarried sons.[3] Sometimes the joint-family cannot afford to "purchase" a wife and hence all relatives, near and distant, must contribute,[4] and, if it be necessary, also the entire *tleush* (*supra*, p. 55).[5] The burden is greatly eased by the possibility of paying the *kalym* in instalments.[6]

The amount to be paid has always been subject to great variations. Before a daughter is given in marriage, the amount of the bride wealth must be agreed upon by both families. Not only are the particular personal qualities of the prospective wife taken into account, as, for example, her virginity,[7] but especially the social standing of her family.[8] The higher the rank (and, as we have seen above, the ranks of the Cherkess are endless) the higher the bride wealth demanded. Thus at one time a maiden of the *uzden* class cost as much as Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,200. One hundred years ago the price was somewhat lower: Rs. 500 for a maiden of the princely class and Rs. 300 for a widow; Rs. 350 for a maiden of the uzden class of the first order and Rs. 200 for a widow; Rs. 220 for a maiden of a lower *uzden* sub-class and Rs. 150 for a widow; Rs. 150 for a maiden of the free class and Rs. 100 for a widow. Dubrovin tells us that this payment went to the father, brother or paternal uncle of the bride, and if she had neither father, nor brother nor paternal uncle no *kalym* was necessary.[9] Sometimes slaves were used as payment.[10]

We have said nothing about the Abkhaz, for in essentials and even in many particulars they agree perfectly with the Cherkess. In fact, the marriage and family *adats* of the Abkhaz and those of the Cherkess are so much alike that Ladyženskij regards the Abkhaz as a Cherkess tribe.[11]

The NORTHEASTERN CAUCASIANS. As elsewhere in the Caucasus, the *kalym* in Ingushetia and Chechnia may consist of money, cattle, arms and

---

[3] Ladyženskij, FT, p. 206.

[4] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 140.

[5] Longworth, *A Year among the Circassians*, I, p. 234.

[6] Neumann, *Russland und die Tscherkessen* (1840), p. 117.

[7] "Adats of the Black Sea Line, Kuban and Terek Territories," Leontovič, II, p. 253, § 162.

[8] Leontovič, II, p. 253, §§ 163—165. V. V. Vasil'kov, "Očerk byta temirgoevcev," SMOMPK, XXIX (1901), No. 1, p. 90, sets the bride-price of the Termirgoi as follows: for an ordinary peasant girl Rs. 600; for a girl of noble birth Rs. 1, 500; for a princess Rs. 3,000.

[9] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 140 f.

[10] *ibid.*

[11] We do not of course accept this faulty classification. The Abkhaz, Ubykhs, and Cherkess are *distinct* peoples.

58 171

(14) Then there is the fact that *a woman constitutes an asylum* for any murderer,[27] a fact found among the North Caucasians as well as among the Asiatic nomads.

(15) The *adats regarding divorce*,[28]

(16) the *penalties for sexual offenses*,[29]

(17) the *division of labour*,[30] allowing men plenty of time for loafing, sport, and raids,

(18) and many other *adats which place the female sex at a great disadvantage*[31] remind us very much of a pastoral society.

171 596 614

(19) Then, of course, there are the many other features of the North Caucasian marriage and family *adats* which we have been able only to touch upon rather superficially, for they refer to the joint-family and kinship in general rather than to the biological family. The North Caucasian society, for example, has had till recently a *patriarchal joint-family organization*[32] very similar to that found among pastoral nomads. Just as among the Indo-Europeans and the Turco-Mongols the central interest of the North Caucasian has been, and in places still is, the joint-family. According to the *adats*, the individual family, till it becomes independent, plays a very subordinate part in society. The tribe and state mean but little. Crimes, criminals, and penalties in the strict sense of the word are of very recent origin : any damage done to the sib (not so much to any individual !), whether accidental or intentional, are the only form of " crime " found in the *adats*. The reparation of the damages made by the " offending " sib (not the individual who inflicted the harm) corresponds to our concept of penalty. We have also said very little about the *inheritance rights* of the mountaineers of North Caucasia, for to speak of inheritance without first describing the joint-family and kinship *adats* would be impossible. It seems that originally, just as is the case in pastoral nomadic societies, the rights were restricted to the male children with special privileges reserved for the first-born son. Finally, there is hardly another place in the world where *blood-feuds* are so common as in the Caucasus ; and, we know, pastoral nomadic peoples have always been fond of settling their quarrels in this particular manner, more so than any other people. In a word, we are dealing with a " pastoral nomadic " marriage and family when we deal with North Caucasian marriage and family *adats*.

[681] 428 [628]

171

We must however, keep in mind that there are different zones of intensity of nomadic traits : in North Caucasia the most pastoral nomadic in character are the marriage and family of the Cherkess ; then perhaps follow those of the Abkhaz, then the Chechens, and finally the Lesghians. The Ossetine *adats* are perhaps even more typically pastoral nomadic than those of the Cherkess. The Kumykian and Nogain *adats*, as well as those of other Turco-Mongols of North Caucasus,

[27] *Supra*, pp. 159 f.
[28] *Supra*, pp. 132—137.
[29] *Supra*, pp. 168—179, 182.
[30] *Supra*, pp. 156—159.
[31] *Supra*, pp. 152—156.
[32] *Supra*, pp. 44 f.